

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kehinde Wiley: *Rumors of War* Permanently Installed at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



Photo by Travis Fullerton © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, December 2019

RICHMOND, VA (DEC 13, 2019) — Kehinde Wiley's 27-foot tall sculpture, *Rumors of War*, was permanently installed at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), at its entrance on historic Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond, Virginia. A crowd estimated at more than 5000 people attended the unveiling in a community celebration that included remarks by Kehinde Wiley; The Honorable Ralph Northam, Governor of Virginia; The Honorable Levar Stoney, Mayor of the City of Richmond; Alex Nyerges, VMFA's Director and CEO; Dr. Monroe Harris, VMFA's President of the Board of Trustees; Valerie Cassel Oliver, VMFA's Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art; and Sean Kelly, founder, Sean Kelly Gallery.

Artwork Details:

Kehinde Wiley

Rumors of War, 2019

Patinated bronze with stone pedestal

Overall: 27'4 7/8" H x 25'5 7/8" L x 15'9" 5/8" W

First unveiled in Times Square, New York on Sept. 27, 2019 as a partnership between Times Square Arts, Sean Kelly Gallery and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), *Rumors of War* is Wiley's first monumental public sculpture and largest work-to-date, continuing the artist's career-long investigation into the politics of representation, race, gender and power.

Mounted proudly on its large stone pedestal, *Rumors of War* is the artist's direct response to the ubiquitous Confederate sculptures that populate the United States, particularly in the American South. Standing at just under three stories tall, Wiley's sculpture depicts a young, African American figure dressed in urban

streetwear and sitting astride a massive horse in a striking pose based on the equestrian monument to Confederate States Army general James Ewell Brown “J.E.B.” Stuart on Richmond’s Monument Avenue.

The work was inspired when Wiley was visiting Richmond for the opening of his retrospective exhibition, *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic*, at VMFA in June 2016. After encountering the city’s Confederate monuments, the artist felt compelled to extend his stay to study and reflect upon the sculptures and their legacy.

Kehinde Wiley states, “The inspiration for *Rumors of War* is war—is an engagement with violence. Art and violence have for an eternity held a strong narrative grip with each other. *Rumors of War* attempts to use the language of equestrian portraiture to both embrace and subsume the fetishization of state violence. *Rumors of War* is also about openness, about a new America. I am honored to have *Rumors of War* in Richmond, in a context which is consequential on a level that goes well beyond museum walls, exposing the beautiful and terrible potentiality of art to sculpt the language of domination.”

Rumors of War encourages visitors to consider broader perspectives on traditional narratives of heroism and representation in American history, culture and with national monuments. In the early 2000s, Wiley created a series of paintings entitled *Rumors of War*, which explored a repositioning of the iconography of wealth and warfare in historical paintings. The largescale works in this series anachronistically replaced the traditionally white, aristocratic subjects typical of the genre with young, African American men in street clothes.

VMFA Director and CEO Alex Nyerges states, “This is a historic moment for us all. It is a moment that’s not just for the museum, not just for Richmond, not just for Virginia, and not just for the United States of America, but for all people. As we think about the inspiration that art brings to the world, where art can change our lives, and how art can make the world as we know it better today and for tomorrow, few people have been able to capture these possibilities as well as Kehinde Wiley with the unveiling of *Rumors of War*. We are proud to be its permanent home.”

Wiley is perhaps best known for his portrait of President Barack Obama and his vibrant portrayals of contemporary African American and African-Diasporic individuals that subvert the hierarchies and conventions of European and American portraiture. Seeking to challenge the lack of representation of black and brown men and women in our dominant visual, historical, and cultural narratives, Wiley’s subjects have ranged from street-cast individuals that the artist encountered while traveling around the world to many of the most important and well-renowned African-American cultural and political figures of our generation, including The Notorious B.I.G., LL Cool J, Michael Jackson, Carrie Mae Weems and President Barack Obama.

Sean Kelly states, “In his work, Kehinde has consistently addressed the historical imbalance of the representation of the depiction of the black body in cultural and art historical context. At the same time, he has virtually singlehandedly reinvigorated and reimagined the genres of figurative painting and traditional portraiture for the 21st century. Without question, Kehinde Wiley is amongst the most influential, provocative and compelling artists of our time.

About the Artist

Kehinde Wiley holds a BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, an MFA from Yale University and an honorary doctorate from Rhode Island School of Design. In 2002, he became an Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Wiley’s work has been the subject of exhibitions worldwide and is in the permanent collections of numerous museums, including the National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Museum of Contemporary

Art, Los Angeles; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Studio Museum in Harlem; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; the Denver Art Museum; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the High Museum, Atlanta; the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH; the Phoenix Art Museum; the Milwaukee Art Museum; the Jewish Museum, New York; and the Brooklyn Museum. The U.S. Department of State honored Wiley in 2015 with the Medal of Arts, celebrating his commitment to cultural diplomacy through the visual arts. In February 2018, Wiley's portrait of Barack Obama was added to the permanent installation of Presidential portraits in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. In October of the same year, Kehinde was honored with a W.E.B. Du Bois medal for his significant contributions to African and African-American history and culture and his advocacy for intercultural understanding and human rights. Wiley is represented by Sean Kelly Gallery in New York, New York.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 50,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its history. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information and museum hours, visit www.VMFA.museum or call 804.340.1400

About Sean Kelly, New York

Since its inception in 1991, Sean Kelly Gallery has been internationally regarded for its diverse, intellectually driven program and highly regarded roster of artists. The Gallery has garnered worldwide attention for its collaborations with renowned cultural institutions, coordinating hundreds of exhibitions on behalf of its artists at an array of prestigious museums. In October 2012, Sean Kelly opened in its current location, a 22,000 square foot space at 475 Tenth Avenue in a historic 1914 building in Hudson Yards. Over the course of more than twenty-five years, the Gallery has become a symbol for high quality, thought-provoking contemporary art and conversation, most recently with the launch of Collect Wisely in May 2018. Collect Wisely is an overarching advertising, podcast, social media, and event driven campaign aimed at refocusing the discourse around collecting to return to the heart of the matter: discussing art, artists, and a passion for collecting and connoisseurship. In January 2019 the gallery opened Sean Kelly Asia a project space in Taipei, Taiwan. With this space, the gallery will bring its important international program to greater prominence in Asia's dynamic art scene.

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